

cultural exchange

in the garment factory where I work
all the young Chinese guys are
kung-fu freaks
they're always kicking at each other
punching boxes & hissing & spitting
moving sideways like crabs
showing me Chinese movie magazines
pictures of kung-fu heroes
smeared with blood
kicking their front legs up
seven feet or more.

they take in two or three movies a week
& the plot is almost always the same:
there is a small Chinese village
it looks somehow like an old western town
& the place is being terrorized
by some Japanese villains
they go around grimacing, making ugly faces
killing women & children
like marauding Indians
until a slim hipped hero emerges &
kicks the shit out of hundreds of
fat Japs
& he never has to worry about
running out of bullets.

most of these guys are students
they study business or accounting
have their hair done
so it doesn't look so straight
go to ball games when they
run out of kung-fu movies.

their young anglo co-workers come in
carrying Lao-tzu & talking of
buddhism & last night's opium.

the failed novelist

he watches tv every night
I see the blue glow from my place
stays up till dawn
watching old movies
hosted by a used car salesman
talks about that salesman
like he was a drinking buddy.

spent years writing the novel
living the bohemian life in Paris
then came home & started collecting
rejection slips
doesn't write much anymore
says whenever he gets going
something snaps & he finds
he's writing the same thing
all over again.

in conversation he is sometimes brilliant
when he's had enough to drink
telling stories & cracking jokes
as much aglow as the tv.

he has this ninety year old aunt
living down the peninsula
can't ever remember talking to her
about anything but his bowels
she just assumed everyone was constipated
used to make his lunch
when he was a kid
never failed to give him the shits.

recently she sent him a care package
for his birthday
the usual t-shirts & drawers & socks
plus a bag of prunes &
a few hard boiled eggs.

she hoped all was well with him
the brief note said
& that he was regular.

the suffering artist

he gets drunk & starts insulting everyone
it's always the same
a bunch of people sitting around
drinking beer & talking
& suddenly he whips out his suffering
exposes his bleeding heart
like a pervert in a raincoat
there you are, look at that
I'm suffering, heh heh.

no one knows what he's talking about
no one else suffers
or at least not like he suffers
he's an artist
& that makes everything okay